

This chapter will go in depth to the underlying principles of preparation and its strategic employment. The reader should understand how to employ preparation in their own matches and understand it when analyzing high level matches. When I watch world cup or olympic bouts I am sometimes able to predict both which action will take place and who will score BEFORE the action occurs. Obviously prediction with this much precision is not possible for most touches, but it is for some touches if you are adept at reading preparation and real intentions. With an understanding of technical analysis and the principles of preparation you may be able to see the matrix that underlies a fencing match.

Technically speaking, preparation is anything that prepares a touch. This probably isn't very helpful so we will use the practical definition of preparation instead.

Preparation as it is practically employed is forward pressure, most often a half step to seek distance for an attack. Forward pressure may or may not incorporate blade technique. Because an attack that begins from too far away is doomed to fail, fencer's cannot allow any movement forward to telegraph an attack as they cover distance. By stepping into distance and backing out, we can seek the right opportunity to attack or keep away should our opponent attack in preparation. What typically occurs is a series of steps into distance and then backing off, until the right moment presents itself.

A pattern of steps would be:

Step in - back off.

Step in, back off.

Step in, back off.

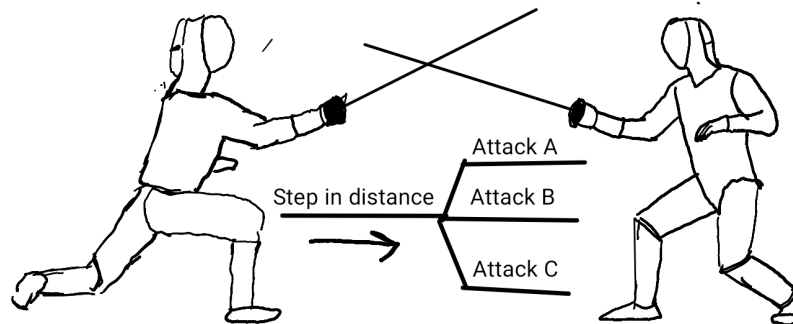
Step in, back off.

Step in, ATTACK!.

Let's break everything down, from a to z.

First off, why prioritize an offensive action? Doesn't preparation set up defensive actions as well? The answer is yes, but offensive capability is what forces your opponent to respond to your preparation. If you lack offensive capability and your opponent figures that out, you're in trouble. It means they don't have to respect your distance and in turn can seek any distance they want. Imagine a battle between two armies in which one army can never seek engagement, and one army can attack when it wants and maneuver around the battlefield as much as it needs to until it finds the right time to attack. It doesn't matter how good the defending army may be, since the attacking army will always win if they dictate the terms of engagement. It is the fact that they may be assaulted which prevents free maneuver of any one army and constrains their movements within the parameters of their opponent's capability.

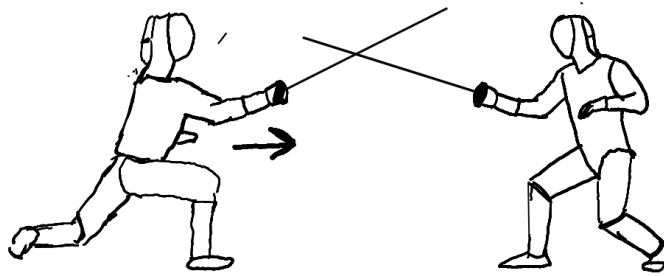
Visuals can make this easier. In the below example, see the left fencer step into distance to facilitate an attack. Depending on the opponent's response, he has a number of options to choose from.



Fencer A steps forward
facilitating distance for
attack options

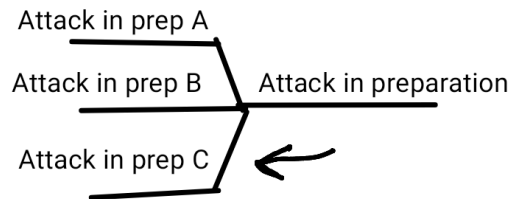
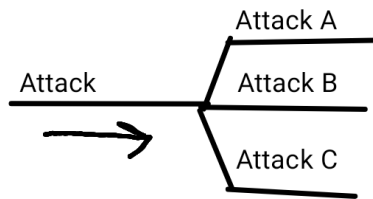
Here's an easy riddle. What happens when Fencer A gets closer to Fencer B?

Answer: Fencer B also gets closer to fencer A. Ergo fencer A's preparation to facilitate an attack
ALSO facilitates a potential attack in preparation by fencer B.



Fencer A steps forward
facilitating distance for
attack options

Fencer B has opportunity for a
number of attack in prep options
as fencer A closes distance

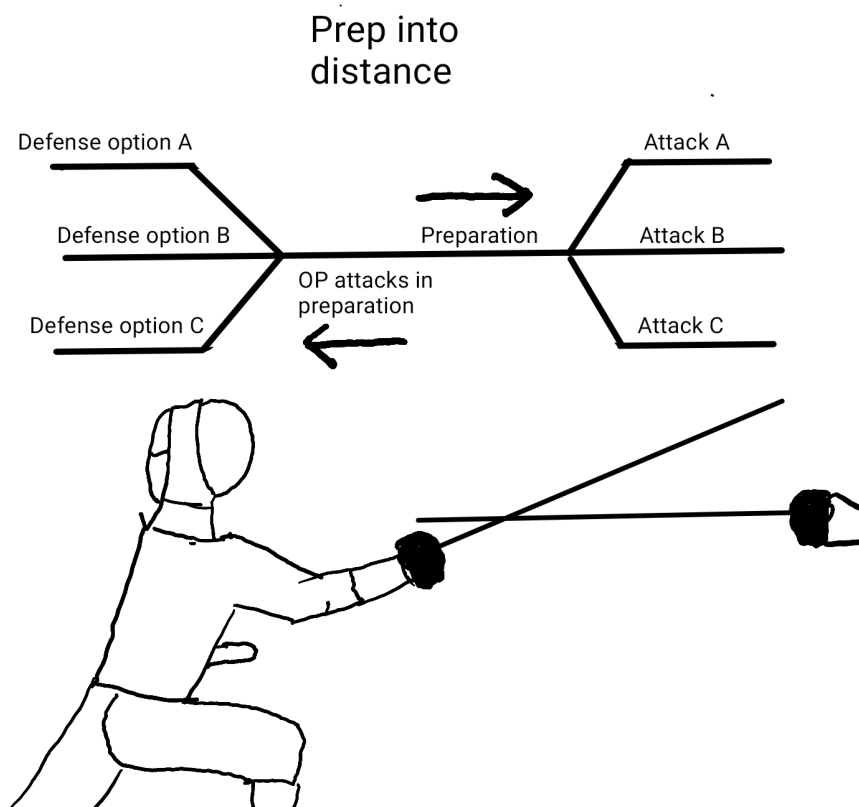


So, when fencer A steps into distance against fencer B, in addition to seeking the potential distance for an attack, he is also wary of a potential attack in preparation by fencer B. If fencer A is clever, he can draw an attack by fencer B and use a defensive option instead.

So when Fencer A makes his preparation, he seeks the distance and time for attack A, B, or C.

If fencer B attacks in preparation, Fencer A is ready with defensive option A, B, or C. Ergo, Fencer A uses his ability to close distance and find attack options as a means of triggering an attack in preparation on his terms to score with defensive options.

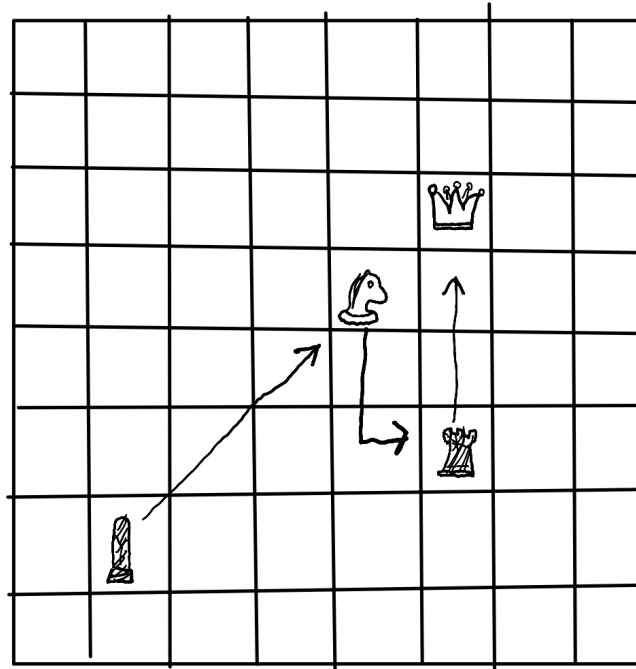
Fencer A understands that offensive capacity facilitates his ability to score with defensive moves. Fencer A is very smart!



The use of offensive and defensive options in conjunction are essential to scoring points. Offensive capacity sets up defensive and counter offensive moves by forcing your opponent to respect your attack. Defensive and counter offensive moves also feed into the attack, as your opponent hesitates to attack in your preparation if he believes he will be trapped. Your opponent's imperative to prevent favorable circumstances is what forces responses that can be exploited.

In chess, the object of the game is to kill the king. To accomplish this, the player must put the opponent into a position in which he loses no matter what move he makes. Below is a hypothetical m scenario.

Black moves his rook to check the White king. Because Black is covering the diagonal with his bishop, White cannot take the rook with the knight. If White moves the king anywhere out of check but to his right (viewer's left, behind the knight) he will lose the knight. If black copies the move and moves left one space threatening the knight, White has no move in which he will not lose the knight. This is exactly the position Black wants White in, losing no matter what moves he takes.



This is why fencing is called physical chess. In Chess, the capability of every piece facilitates what you can do with another piece. The presence of a pawn can determine whether or not the opponent can be checkmated and what is done with one move can affect the inevitability of the outcome a number of moves later. In fencing, every move affects the capacity to perform every other move. Your ability to hit the short target affects your ability to hit the body and vice versa. Your ability to attack facilitates your ability to defend and vice versa. Your ability to parry two affects parry six, which affects your counter offense. The same way no chess piece exists in isolation and has its ability defined by the presence of other pieces, so it is with every potential move in fencing.



All offensive, defensive, and counter offensive moves facilitate each other. The success of every action is built on the potential of other actions.

PREPARATION, AND THE WEB OF INTENTION

In chess, opponents attempt to weave a web over the board and trap their opponents between any number of pieces. When a piece is moved, the intended role of that piece may not be revealed until many moves down the board in which the opponent is trapped and it's too late.

Fencing, particularly epee fencing, operates by a similar principle in that you score by keeping your opponent in a web of your offensive, counter offensive, and defensive capability. You may have heard the phrase "second intention." **EPEE IS A SECOND INTENTION WEAPON.** This means hitting your opponent with an option they did not believe was your intention. You prepare your opponent to expect one option and then instead surprise them with a secondary option. E.g. a second intention.

Here are some basic examples of the use of second intention (There is an extensive list of these kinds of tactics in the TACTICS chapter.)

Scenario 1: Fencer A presses Fencer B. Fencer B believes he has the ability to attack in preparation, but instead is parry riposted. Fencer A meant to draw out an attack from fencer B while giving the appearance he wanted to attack.

Scenario 2: Fencer A presses fencer B. He abruptly stops short at certain moments and subtly betrays the intention to take a second intention parry after B attacks. Thinking he has Fencer A's number, Fencer B attacks with a disengage to evade Fencer A's parry. Fencer A then

counterattacks straight instead of taking a parry, hitting ahead of Fencer B. Fencer B made the mistake of believing he had uncovered his opponent's intention when in fact, Fencer A had a different intention. (Watch Tagliariol vs Jeannet at the 2008 Olympics to see this specific tactic work.)

Just as there is a web between offensive and defensive options between which your opponent is held, you can also interplay different offensive options or defensive options against each other. Like making my opponent believe I will take one parry, and taking another when he attacks. Or making my opponent believe I want to hit his body, when instead I attack the short target. Preparation is about catching your opponent in a web of potential scoring options until you can catch him with the move you were really seeking OR the move which suits the opportunity should he evade your primary intention. Your opponent in turn is attempting to do the same thing to you. Both fencers dissemble their own intentions, and seek to know their opponents true intentions.

WHY THERE IS GREATER LUCK IN EPEE

Unlike in foil or saber, that attacker epee is not protected by right of way and can be picked off with a fast lockout time making a double light much harder. Inherent to epee is greater risk in the attack. While foil and saber comes down almost wholly to technical skill, epee involves a greater amount of deception to trick your opponent and overcome the variable of risk. As a fencer, you must make risk work for you. Successfully doing this relies on strategy, tactics, technical analysis, and preparation. Master the principles of epee and your opponents will be finding themselves consistently unlucky! Preparation overcomes luck by creating the circumstances favorable to score through trapping your opponent.

CONCLUSION:

This chapter has purposefully ignored any technical specifics of preparation or the incorporation of the blade in favor of understanding the underlying principles. Future chapters will get into the execution of specific tactics and techniques with your preparation.